



UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

The Bancroft Library

University of California • Berkeley

Gift of Daniel Smiley, New Paltz, N.Y.



Smart Set, v. 69, no. 2, Oct. 1922

The Higher Learning in America

X

The University of California

By Stephen Fitzroy

I

CALIFORNIA is the land of the Californiac. In California, local pride soars to psychopathological heights. California has the best climate, the smoothest highways, the greatest harbors, the greenest grass, the reddest apples, the biggest trees, the sweetest oranges, the handsomest girls, the most sinewy athletes, the acutest statesmen, the gaudiest scenery, and the largest, most intellectual university in the universe.

In the center of all this hurrah lies Berkeley, the site of that university, and squatting against the side of a hill of goodly size, which in the East would be called a mountain, are the shiny new white buildings, the enormous Greek theater and the imposing granite Campanile with the hideous chimes.

II

THE Californiac, taking a deep breath, and placing his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, periodically gives three rousing cheers for the Student Self-Government there on tap—an institution which gives valuable training to future county coroners, Rotary Club orators, and members of the House of Representatives. California campus politics, in fact, are identical with city politics or county politics or State politics or national politics or any other kind of politics that exist among a peo-

ple who steadfastly believe that one thousand or one million or one hundred million casually interested idiots can govern themselves. Student government at the University of California is controlled by a handful of campus pushers. The great majority care no more about it than they do about the government of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Few students vote at the elections, because few of them care a cuss which of a half-dozen candidates gets the job. The remedy is of course obvious. The students should take more interest in their own affairs and see to it that the best men are elected. But the students don't—and neither do their fathers or their mothers or their sisters or their brothers or they themselves take any active interest in their local government or their State government or their national government. Besides, the best men don't want to be elected anyhow. What's the real remedy? I give it up.

III

ANOTHER cherished California institution, one that ranks side by side with Student Self-Government and is even more ridiculous, is the Honor System, surely a droll appellation for the elaborate scheme of spying and tattling which has as its high aim the prevention of cheating at examinations. The student is most emphatically not put upon his honor; he is simply threatened with dire punishment if he is caught and given away by one of his fellow students.

Sentimental seniors, who, having repented of their earlier sins, are appointed to the Student Affairs Committee, make extremely long and dull harangues, filled with hoary and oft-enunciated platitudes by Dr. Frank Crane, informing the new student that he is "on his honor" and then adding that it is his duty to make sure that his neighbor is as honest as himself, and threatening him with loss of credit, disgrace or expulsion, not only if he is caught cheating himself but also if he sees cheating going on and does not gallantly report it. Thus, if I observe the enchanting co-ed on my left surreptitiously acquiring data on proportional representation in Switzerland from the broad-jumper in front of her, and do not deliver her over to the campus catch-polls instantler, I am liable to be cashiered. Personally, I have little desire to cheat in examinations, perchance for the reason that I care very little whether I pass or not, but I do strenuously object to being forced to play the policeman, the secret service man, the prohibition agent to my fellow sufferers. And yet, even the campus comic paper, *The Pelican*, hotly defends this imbecility.

IV

CALIFORNIA has two monthly publications, the aforementioned *Pelican* and *The Occident*. They are published by an organization called the English Club, which, in addition to publishing them, produces a bad play every year in the Greek theater. This club includes most of the actors, soft-shoe dancers, saxophone players, cartoonists, scene-shifters and writers on the campus.

The Pelican is purchased widely and specimens of its drolleries are occasionally reprinted in *Judge* and the *Literary Digest*. It essays a certain innocuous daring and specializes in razzing the co-ed. It is properly scornful of "slickers" and "snakes" and "collar ads," though some of its present editors would be judged guilty on all counts by any impartial jury. Its strongest point is

its cartoons; its weakest its so-called humorous editorials.

The Occident, contemptuously labeled the *Accident* by the common herd, is a literary magazine that is purchased by contributors and their families and friends, and by the intelligentsia of the campus, who also read *Shadowland* and the *Bookman*. It is not so bad as it might be, even though a recent number featured a short story by Elinor Glyn as a model for campus writers (and incidentally as publicity for the Paramount movie company), and an article on the great field for college men in the moving pictures by an ex-assistant director who is taking a course in "The Art of the Theater." There is, of course, always erudite critical comment on the new books and plays and movies by undergraduate critics who announce at the top of their reviews that "this book may be purchased at the Sather Gate Bookshop." There are also some very bad short stories, and some lyrical gems about lolling in the daffodils, the call of the open road, and my mute imprisoned soul. But then again there is occasionally some readable verse by Paul Tanaquil or Stephen Pepper and sometimes a very fair essay by one of the learned doctors.

The *Daily Californian*, besides giving to an eagerly waiting world its inspiring editorials on "Student Self-Government," "The Honor System," "The Morals of the Students" and "The Necessity for College Spirit," prints intriguing articles on the work of the Student Affairs Committee, letters to the editor by disgruntled fellows who will subsequently write similar tosh to the editor of the San Francisco *Chronicle*, and a column of jokes by Marcus Loew out of B. F. Keith.

The *Razzberry Press* is a scarlet sheet published at irregular intervals by the members of the Press Club, in which, under cover of their anonymity, they hurl ribald jests at (1) co-eds and sorority teas, (2) prominent athletes, (3) queeners, fur-footers, snakes and frequenters of hotel lobbies, and (4) the

personal enemies of the members. It is nearly always amusing, but sometimes a little bawdy and overdone.

The *Dill Pickle* is a green paper which generally makes its appearance just after the *Razzberry*. It is published by co-eds who aspire to jobs as society reporters or sob-sisters on the *New York Times*. It is ordinarily a very feeble imitation of the *Razzberry*, but lacks the vulgarity which makes the scarlet sheet as good as it is.

Brass Tacks is a new publication which will probably be suppressed ere this monograph sees the light of day. It is written by the same pessimists who write letters to the editor. Its only merit is that they commonly write destructive instead of constructive criticism. It is, however, generally exceedingly banal.

I hear refreshing rumors on the campus of a new magazine, which, I am informed, is to be called the *Laughing Horse*, and is to thoroughly lampoon every sacred campus tradition. If its editors are not set upon by the American Legion and the local Ku Klux Klan I have hopes for it.

V

THERE is considerable interest in things literary and cultural on the campus, whether real or bogus I am not yet quite sure. So-called "culture courses" are always heavily attended, especially by the women. The men still cling to the good American superstition that only women and sissies go in for that sort of thing. Lectures on modern Russian literature, American literature, the drama, ancient, Elizabethan, Restoration and modern, and all kinds of poetry are invariably crowded to the doors. Whether this is a sign of intelligent interest or simply a proof that these courses are easy it is difficult to tell. The written critiques which grow out of them are mostly masterpieces of banality. I recently heard an apparently intelligent and well-read young woman read a treatise on Hutchinson's "If

Winter Comes" in a tone of ecstatic awe. In the same breath she spoke of Byron, Hamlet, Flaubert and Turgenyev. She is typical of a great many of the literary undergraduates. They apparently read everything, from Baudelaire to Guest, from Artzibashev to Gene Stratton-Porter, and they speak of them all in the same terms. I should like to hear this young lady review "The Sheik" and "Madame Bovary."

One of the most encouraging signs of intellectual activity on the campus is the success of the Wheeler Hall Plays, a cumulative series of first-rate dramas, which are presented on the platform stage in the Benjamin Ide Wheeler lecture hall. Sam Hume and Irving Pichel, the directors, starting from nothing, have built up this enterprise until it now offers the best series of plays being produced in any American university. A new play is presented every two weeks, each production being repeated three times. Schnitzler's "The Lonely Way" was recently played for the first time in America.

VI

ALTHOUGH California is not particularly rich in campus customs and traditions, she has a few which are both unique and picturesque. The bonfire rallies in the Greek theatre are the most impressive of the regular shows. In spite of the horrible speeches which the old grads trot out and the ancient jokes which are retailed, these rallies manage to achieve a certain barbaric splendor which is worth all the torture of sitting on concrete steps and alternately roasting and freezing. The great bonfire in the center, where in old Athens stood the altar to Dionysus; the thousands of howling demons packed so close around it that their eyebrows are singed; the riot of colors on the co-eds, weirdly illuminated by the roaring flames; the delirious strains of syncopation; the mad whirl of the serpentine, the yells which cause the old hills to tremble—all these things make incomparable spec-

tacles. There is something about them that you will see nowhere else, something that belongs alone to California, something that makes the blood race in the veins of the most unemotional.

It is a long drop from such glorious and distinctive shows to the Smoker Rally which is held before the big game, but it too has something in it. Freed from the everlasting censorious eyes of the co-eds, the men become naturally and happily vulgar. Sulphurous stories are told by respectable old Masters of Arts and blood-curdling curses are hurled against the Red-Shirts of Stanford University. This freedom was once achieved in two other unique functions of the campus. Now one of these has joined the shades of steam beer and pretzels, and the other is but a hollow mockery of what it once was. I refer, in the first instance, to the late lamented Skull and Keys initiation, or "running," as it was called. This "running" used to furnish one of the highlights of the college year. It was vulgar, yes, but the whole thing was done in such a spirit of fun that it could have offended nobody but one who deliberately looked for nastiness. But the campus vestals deemed this custom too obscene for the eyes of the W.C.T.U., some of the members were expelled and the whole society placed on probation. So passed one of California's most entertaining shows.

The other custom which has fallen upon evil ways is the guarding of the "C." The "Big C" is a large gold letter, studded with electric lights, which is jammed into the hill, high above the Greek theatre. It is the duty of the Sophomore class to guard this letter from the unholy hands of marauding Red-Shirts, who daub the sacred symbol with red paint if they get a chance. When I was a Soph there were barrels of beer and sandwiches and coffee and other engaging entertainment. They still have the sandwiches and coffee, I believe.

Unlike those of most Eastern universities, the California campus is deserted

after class hours. At five o'clock, when Eastern men are just beginning to come out, the Californians disappear. There are no little groups sitting on the fences or perched on the steps to the library. There are no crowds playing catch or galloping around. The place is utterly deserted, coldly silent, except when the Campanile chimes jar the air with their clamor. The students have gone to their homes in San Francisco or Oakland, or down into the town of Berkeley, or to their frat houses, which are all off the campus.

VII

COLLEGE spirit, while it is present at California, does not assume the virulent aspect that it has in universities where the students live in closer contact with one another. There are, of course, the usual bores who make long speeches on the subject and affirm that the football team will surely lose every game unless the student body stands behind it "like one man." The crowds do turn out for the football game, but not because they think that it is their duty to do so. They like football and they have a very human eagerness to be with the winner. California has not lost a game for two years and the crowds are enormous. If she had not won a game for two years the team would play to empty bleachers. Nothing could tempt such a crowd to a chess game or a debate or a soccer game except free hot-dogs and beer or a concert by one of the campus jazz bands. The general custom seems to be to go to what you like and let the other fellow do the same. Of course a man who stays away from a big game to attend a performance of "Hedda Gabler" would be looked upon as an idiot by his fellows, but such a thing never really happens.

There is nothing particularly distinctive about the annual big game between Stanford and California. It is very much like the big game between any other rival universities. It is usually a very bad exhibition of football.

VIII

THE faculty at California is, I suppose, one of average sagacity. There are several able men on it, and the usual old chromos. The passing of Henry Morse Stephens cost the university its one really great teacher. There are, however, a number of learned and surprisingly liberal pedagogues, who strike me as being not only mellow, but good scouts as well.

In the courses of study, I can pick out no great and distinctive one. Perhaps the most distinctive is Great Books, a series of lectures by the venerable and universally respected Dean Gailey. Again, there is General Literature, a lecture and reading course in comparative literature given by members of all the different language departments. Outside of these two and Sam Hume's Playwriting and Harold Bruce's Critical Writing, I know of no course that may not be duplicated anywhere.

California has produced four world-famous athletes—Ralph Rose, Doc Beeson, the giant Liversedge and Brick Muller, but only one literary artist. I refer to Frank Norris—and he never took a degree, but quit in disgust after nearly four years. We can claim a few modern young writers—Genevieve Taggard, Hildegard Flanner, Paul Tanaquil, Mary Caroline Davies and the bulge-browed Sidney Howard—but what a pitiful list it is compared to the one that any good Eastern university can offer! Of course there are Jack London, Richard Walton Tully, Max Brand and Jackson Gregory, all of whom we might claim if we wished. Tenth-raters all, save perhaps London, and he quit us after one semester. But the woods are full of California graduates who have become eminent merchants, Rotarians, bond salesmen, politicians, motion picture directors, actors, newspaper editors, criminal lawyers, judges, prohibition enforcement officers, bootleggers, and State senators.

IX

I AM informed by old-timers that California men are not what they used to be. I suspect that this is only partly true. There is, to be sure, less seen than once upon a time of the college man who chewed tobacco and smoked a filthy pipe, wore decrepit and dirty cords and a blue flannel shirt, and sat on Senior bench by the hour and "piped the flight." Most of the lads now wear belled trousers and silk shirts, purple cravats and beaver hats. They chew Spearmint and smoke Turkish cigarettes. There is less obvious drinking and gambling, and less open sewing of wild oats, but these great sports still go on, though more circumspectly. I am rather widely acquainted among the campus bootleggers, and every one that I know is heavily patronized. Take, for instance, that little oasis down by the bay, a five-minute ride by machine. This little village is affectionately known as the Land of the Free. It boasts, to my certain knowledge, of nine bootleggers, and two open crap games.

But this last frontier is largely the rendezvous of stags. Co-eds are almost never seen there, save a few bold spirits who occasionally visit one of the cafés on casual slumming tours. The fair damsels do, however, sometimes drop into the roadhouses east of Oakland, the better known and comparatively innocuous places on what used to be the old San Francisco Barbary Coast, and the resorts along the Frisco Beach, south of the Cliff House. All things considered, though, these co-eds are not such speedy sprites as they are alleged to be. They like their fun, their jazz, their joy-rides, and perhaps a little of the spirits that inebriate as well as cheer. Some there are who can drink as much synthetic gin as any man on the campus perhaps, but they strike me in the main as being a remarkably circumspect bunch—gay, sophisticated, a little too wise, perhaps, but considerably superior in intellect and horse-sense, not only to the girls of day-before-yesterday, but to their male detractors of today.

X

WITH fraternities I have no quarrel. I myself belong to no organization whatever and I have no more desire to join a college frat than I have to join the Masons, the Knights of Columbus or the Ku Klux Klan. Yet I have nothing to say against those who do belong to them, or those who aspire to membership. Fraternities are an excellent institution for men from the hinterland. Raw youths from the deserts of Nevada and Arizona and the backwoods of Los Angeles and Powell and Market are restrained from running hog-wild. They are made to keep decent hours on week nights, to devote a reasonable amount of time to study, to go in for athletics or some other campus activity. A worthy mission. Personally, though, I am afraid that I would not relish being told when to retire and when to study, what activity to go out for and what marks I am expected to get. Neither do I look with favor on the prospect of washing dishes, sweeping sidewalks and running errands under the supervision of natty lads in tweed suits whose favorite author is James Oliver Curwood.

XI

It's a great old show, this educational circus. Pink-faced and wasp-waisted student editors flaying "slickers" and "parlor snakes"; future salesmen for "La Magnifico" eight-cent cigars writing poetry for the campus literary magazine; round-shouldered and near-consumptive Doctors of Philosophy sweating over essays for the *Yale Review*; baby-vamps with bobbed hair luring credulous youths from Long Beach, Cal., into smoking Bull Durham and eating in Bohemian waffle kitchens; aspiring candidates for the doctorate eagerly seizing on Keith Preston's scheme of writing a thesis on the pornographies of unexpurgated classics; little groups of serious thinkers, meeting twice weekly to discuss the tendencies in Georgian poetry; butchers' sons from

Red Bluff posturing as campus Don Juans; earnest young men aspiring to lectureships in the English department at six hundred a year; literary co-eds affecting horn-rimmed spectacles, a copy of "Droll Stories," and long black rubber cigarette holders; whimsical essayists, signing themselves "Gentle Reader," taking sly digs at modern literature through the columns of *Student Opinion*; prospective criminal lawyers playing the traps in campus jazz bands; the editor of the comic monthly breaking into the public gazettes in the rôle of profound thinker by hazarding the opinion that co-eds like to be kissed; committees composed of candidates for the teacher's recommendation passing resolutions closing the campus dances one hour earlier; the president of the university taking the popular side in a public debate on Bolshevism with a mountebank; a million dollars being expended in building the largest athletic stadium in the world. Yes, it's a great old show and well worth the price of admission. If California were Oxford it couldn't very well be in California.

XII

IN summing up, I believe it is the customary thing to exhume all of the platitudes that the lachrymose old grads who ruin the rallies expect. One should relent a little, toss a few bunches of sweet lilacs as a sop and terminate with some obvious hokum about the best days of one's life, the place where one finally found one's self, the beautiful and lasting friendships that one formed, the broadening contacts with superior intellects, and so on down the line. Partly true, unquestionably, but nothing but a mouthing of the obvious. It seems to me that the best thing that I got out of my four college years was the realization that I had no education at all. I have caught just a faint glimpse of far-away vistas, a brief, furtive sight of beautiful and delightful things. Four years of college have shown me the first elusive beginnings of a path.

